New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1956

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Glass Menagerie"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 22, 1956

THEATER

'The Glass Menagerie'

By WALTER KERR

AT CITY CENTER the gentleman caller who has inadvertently broken two hearts pauses in the tenement doorway, turns to Helen Hayes, and says "I want to thank you again for a beautiful evening." My thanks, too.

• • •

The evening is entrancing on quite a few counts. I'm sure that everyone who saw the late Laurette Taylor play the frowsy, chatterbox, chin-up mother in Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie" has felt ever since that the part belonged permanently to that brilliant, diamond-hard actress. Helen Hayes, taking up the faded evening-gown from which the "tired roses" have been removed, is not out to erase that impression. She has simply arranged things so that the part now belongs permanently to two people.

Miss Taylor played it like a scratching tree-branch working on a window-pane on a night the wind never stopped. Miss Hayes plays it like a belligerent sparrow bent on marching her brood right into kingdom-come. She is a battling bantam cock bashing at the world in an untidy bathrobe, teetering on stiff little legs with the determination of a dowdy Napoleon, waddling wildly and at top speed up a short flight of stairs to collar her restless, runaway son.

Though there are fleeting reminders of the downcast Taylor mouth, the fiercely bright face haloed by a straggling grey bob, the soul is different. It is a bit simpler, perhaps; not so much a grinding echo of glories long lost as a foolish shining faith in glories yet to come. The tartness and the screeching are still there, in honest measure. Yet to watch Miss Hayes spread her thinning taffeta and waltz vaguely about a dingy room, only to pause in sudden, deathlike, but yearning stillness before the photograph of the man who deserted her is to see this "ugly, babbling witch" in a new, and equally valid, perspective. Amanda Wingfield is here a spectre to make you cry.

While we're on the subject, there can't have been too many theatergoers at City Center last night sullen enough to have resisted the incredibly well-written and infinitely touching sequence in which a crippled Laura finds a moment of candle-lit happiness. Alan Schneider has staged the "gentleman-caller" episode with a delicacy that glows as brightly as the little figurines on Laura's table.

Lois Smith stammers out her first blundering evasions, then slowly melts into a radiant lost princess, with a sure and moving grace. And Lonny Chapman, grinning around his chewing-gum and leaping at the chance to autograph an old dance program, balances the false promise and the inevitable despair of the scene without a single false gesture. When sentiment comes, it comes without cheating; the joy and the shattered daydream are equally real.

• • •

James Daly's exasperated, hard-working, well-meaning son is carefully—and caustically—outlined, too. The writing of the 'poetic' transitional passages may seem a trace heavy in his matter-of-fact hands; but the bitter irony of his "El Diablo" flareup and the sodden song-and-dance he gives his sister after a night on the town are sharp and stinging vignettes.

In short, this is a beautiful production of a beautiful play, and what are you waiting for?

"THE GLASS MENAGERIE"

Play by Tennessee Williams; staged by Alan Schneider; adaptation by Jo Mielziner's original designs and lighting by Peggy Clark; presented by the New York City Center Theatre Company (Jean Daltymple, director) at the City Center, November 21, 1956. The cast:

The Mother.....Helen Hayes
Her Son.....James Daly
Her Daughter.....Lois Smith
The Gentleman Caller.....
Lonny Chapman

New York Post

November 23, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Fine Revival of a Beautiful Play

What a lovely and touching play "The Glass Menagerie" is! It is the miracle of Tennessee Williams and of the theater's alchemy that, out of the materials of frustration, bitterness and resentment, he could bring such tender beauty, such oddly gentle and forgiving compassion. With Helen Hayes playing the role immortalized by Laurette Taylor, the admirable revival, which opened Wednesday night at the City Center, recaptures all the warmth, sadness, humor and poignancy of one of the memorable works of American dramatic art, and it is a cause for rejoicing.

Mr. Williams has written some stunning and powerful plays since "The Glass Menagerie," and he has gained in dynamic forcefulness and sheer theatrical impact. But, in the process of what I think is growth, he may quite possibly have lost something, too. There is a sense of forgiveness, of tolerance, almost of serenity of spirit in this early play of his that may not be as overwhelming as the dark and tormented lyricism of doom which haunts "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," but there was also a kind of mellow tenderness certainly lacking in the later works.

No one who saw "The Glass Menagerie" 11 years ago will ever forget Miss Taylor's portrayal of the nagging but pitiful mother, or the playing of Eddie Dowling, Julie Haydon and Anthony Ross in the other roles. But it assuredly doesn't detract from the excellence of Miss Hayes, James Daly, Lois Smith and Lonny Chapman in the current revival that they can face such memories and still come through triumphantly. Perhaps Miss Hayes doesn't quite make you believe in the mother's lost days as a Dixie belle as vividly as Miss Taylor did, but she is wonderfully moving, nevertheless.

It is, indeed, one of the greatest victories of both Mr. Williams and Miss Hayes that the mother emerges as such a moving figure. For this nagging and domineering old lady is far from an admirable woman. Her tyranny, her garrulousness and her selfishness make the son's flight from home completely understandable. Because, though, playwright and actress have observed her with such humorous sympathy, seeing the intrepid spirit, the surviving gaiety and the real if misguided affection for her family beneath that intolerable nagging, she becomes, despite everything, truly pathetic.

One of the most moving episodes in modern dramatic literature is the scene between the crippled daughter and her "gentleman caller," in which pity, rue-fulness, truth and a true delicacy of feeling are mingled in the most beautiful proportions. And it is difficult to imagine the encounter more superbly played than it is in the City Center revival. Miss Smith is a young actress of the finest emotional sensitivity and Mr. Chapman is among the ablest of the oncoming young American actors, and they make the scene memorable in its heartbreak and its honesty.

In the role of the runaway brother, who is both a prominent figure in the drama and the commentator upon it, Mr. Daly is excellent. I think he is perhaps more effective in the former capacity than in the latter, but he is always strikingly good. If all four players deserve rare credit for standing up so successfully against one's unforgettable memories of their predecessors, Miss Hayes merits special admiration for playing the part in which Miss Taylor achieved final greatness and making it one of her loveliest performances. "The Glass Menagerie" is again a treat

DAILY NEWS

November 22, 1956

'Glass Menagerie' Is Still Aglow With Rare and Tender Beauty

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Glass Menagerie" is Tennessee Williams' finest play, and the years since he wrote it have not dimmed its shimmering quality. Now it is being given a wonderfully tender and lovely performance by Helen Hayes, Lois Smith, James Daly and Lonny Chapman at the City Center.

This, you remember, is Williams' affectionate, compassionate and poetic nocturne about four people in a shabby-genteel flat in St. Louis—a mother, her rebellious son, her excruciatingly shy daughter and a Gentleman Caller. It is a minor-key hymn to the human race, and when it is played right it is a composition of great beauty.

Last evening at the City Center it was played right. The dauntless Miss Hayes has stepped into the faded ball gown once worn so gloriously by the late Laurette Taylor, and is giving another of her superbly resourceful and affecting performances. Miss Hayes simply cannot do anything wrong on a stage, and this is one of her finest achievements.

A Beautiful Scene

Miss Smith gives a haunting, heart-breaking impersonation of the crippled girl who has compressed all her eager life into a pathetic collection of little glass animals. Daly, acting as both narrator and son, moves the drama along easily and quietly whenever it needs to be moved.

And Chapman, as the Gentleman Caller who works in a warehouse but dares have dreams of a larger life, is superb. The scene in which he in his blunt and almost inarticulate way gives Miss Smith a few radiant moments of hope and happiness is a very fine example of the artistry which can be evoked by a playwright and two sensitive players. Some of this evocation of course is due to Alan Schneider's quietly authoritative direction.

Add to all these fine people and qualities an excellent setting patterned after Jo Mielziner's original design, and highly effective lighting by Peggy Clark, and one comes up with a piece of theatre which is a gem. Not a flashy gem like a diamond, but a softly glowing one like a moonstone.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 23, 1956

Through a Glass, Not Darkly

By TOM DONNELLY.

To state it paradoxically, since Laurette Taylor's classic performance as the mother in "The Glass Menagerie" is unforgettable, the only practical thing to do is forget about it in appraising Helen Hayes' interpretation of the same role in the revival at the City Center.

This brings us crashing into an embarrassing critical problem. There really isn't a great deal to say about Miss Hayes' performance as Amanda Wingfield. It is an expert comedy contrivance. Miss Hayes does not miss one of the humorous possibilities in the role. And she scarcely touches on any of the tragic implications.

She Flutters About.

It is just possible that Amanda Wingfield is Tennessee Williams' finest character creation. Watch her as she flutters about in that slum in St. Louis, industriously calling up visions of her glorious past, when Southern planters swarmed ardently down upon her, each and every one of them dazzled by her grace, her beauty, her vivacity, her skill in the dance. Amanda so loved the simple splendors of nature. Let her see a jonquil while out riding, and her beau must stop the carriage, no matter how inconvenient, so that Amanda might clutch the fragile yellow flower to her bosom. Let her mother say that all the vases in the house were full, and Amanda would say that she would hold the surplus blooms in her own two hands.

Watch her as she nags at her son, insisting that he chew his food properly, and demonstrating to him the approved method of employing jaws and tongue. Listen to her warn that he shouldn't drink that coffee too fast: the swallowing of too hot coffee perforates the lining of the stomach. "Rise and shine!" she calls to him every work morning, "Rise and shine!"

Where does her son go at night? To the movies? Incredible! Nobody goes to the movies as often as all that. When the badgered Tom Wingfield snarls that actually he frequents opium dens, watch Amanda shrink back in alarm, sure that her boy must have taken to drink, like his errant father before him.

She Minces Forth.

Hear Amanda cry indignantly that she will not allow her son to bring the novels of that Mr. D. H. Lawrence into her house, and study her as she comes mincing forth, a spectacle in decayed draperies retrieved from an old trunk, to greet the "gentleman caller" she prays will be the salvation of her crippled daughter.

Miss Hayes manages all this to a maximum droll effect. Her Amanda is quick, pugnacious, lovably exasperating.

But in this Amanda there is no hint of the desperation of a trapped creature; no suggestion of a mother compulsively poisoning the lives of her children by the very frenzy of her desire to save them, no sense of a woman who, however ridiculous her pretensions may be, has nevertheless the dignity that comes from a valiant refusal to surrender to despair. Miss Hayes misses at least half of Mr. Williams' intention, and, unfortunately, the more significant half.

In case there was any doubt in anyone's mind, "The Glass Menagerie" remains a play of rare quality, simple, eloquent and true. I can't judge to what extent director Alan Schneider is responsible for the impression created by Miss Hayes, but he has gotten first-rate performances from James Daly as the son, from Lois Smith as the timid Laura, and from Lonny Chapman as the gentleman caller who is disappointed in life, but not discouraged.

Daily Mirror

November 22, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

City Center Offers 'Glass Menagerie'

• Helen Hayes scores in revival of Tennessee Williams hit.

Amanda Whitfield, of Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie," is one of the gabbiest old gals ever to haunt a play. She drives her husband away from home, her hard-working son half nuts and her shy, crippled daughter to the verge of hysteria with her incessant chatter.

Amanda could make the inscrutible sphinx lift its eyebrows in surprise at her ability to toss words around. When it comes to fanning the breeze, this harridan has the endurance of a marathon runner. Like the proverbial brook, she just babbles along. Brook our eye! She's a torrential river of talk.

THIS FADED Southern belle is obsessed with the gentleman callers who used to pay her court, and nags her exasperated son to bring one home for his sister from among his friends at a St. Louis warehouse. He does, and the pal is sympathetic but unwilling to permit the designing Amanda to corral him for her drab menage.

If we had Amanda for a neighbor, we'd most certainly toss the rowdiest lease-breaking party ever held in Manhattan. Meanwhile, we'd buy a set of ear-plugs in self defense. Not that they'd do much good with this old witch riding her broomstick.

Yet, as Helen Hayes etches Amanda in the current revival at the City Center, she's such a well-meaning bore that you feel sorry for her. She's bouncy and verbose. She doesn't know when she's being insulted by acquaintances to whom she would sell magazine subscriptions. She's a pathetic biddy, because she doesn't realize that her eternal hopes will never sprout wings.

Miss Hayes won salutes from the London critics when she did the role over there in 1948. This is her first performance in the part in New York. She merits rousing bravas for working at the Equity minium to aid the City Center Theatre Company, which needs all of that it can get right now.

JAMES DALY is excellent as the son who would run away to sea to escape his mother's constant rebukes, and a dreary existence in an alley flat. Lois Smith, a young actress of quality, plays the daughter, whose life is wrapped around a collection of glass animals, with a sensitive touch. And Lonny Chapman is quite right as the rugged and kindly Gentleman Caller.

The sets are based on Jo Mielziner's billous, brownish originals. Alan Schneider has directed with an eye to giving Miss Hayes full scope for her gifts. Her Amanda differs from that of the late Laurette Taylor, as it should. Needles to say, interpretations are admirable in their own ways.

"The Glass Menagerie" garnered a caseful of scrolls, awards and cups when first offered here by Eddie Dowling. There's no doubt about it, it's a masterly study in frustration. But the dominant note of gloom is often leavened by wistfully amusing sequences.

"The Glass Menagerie" wears well. That it is still able to cast a spell for appreciative spectators was demonstrated by the robust applause Wednesday evening. And there were cheers for our one and only Helen Hayes.

Journal-American

November 23, 1956

Williams' Gem Brilliantly Led By Miss Hayes

By JOHN McCLAIN

HELEN HAYES should just about own the New York City Center, as of now. Opening there Wednesday night in the Jean Dalrymple revival of Tennessee Williams' best play, "The Glass Menagerie," she proved a lot of positive things. She established the fact that this property was not solely the possession of Laurette Taylor, who created the role; she brought a new biting and almost antagonistic interpretation to the part; she renewed the faith of those who regard her as America's foremost actress.

For as Amanda, the mother living in her frustrated dream world, she gives a fierce force to the author's words which were never there before. In her plaintive way, and with the aid of nothing more than an ill-pressed wrapper, she easily dominates the destinies of her crippled daughter and her rebellious son. The result is warm and rewarding.

Here, it seems to me, is the most impressive and least ostentatious mingling of Mr. Williams talent for both forthright and forceful writing and his preoccupation with symbolism. The daughter's pathetic interest in glass objects is valid; when one is broken the oblique effect is dramatic; there is ageless verity in the son's futile searching, and in his mother's hopeless absorption with the photograph of the man who deserted her.

As the interlocutor, the part played originally by Eddie Dowling with such great effect, James Daly comes up with a bright interpretation of his own. He is younger and more matter-of-fact, and the combination pays off when it's most needed. Lonny Chapman, the long-waited caller, exhibits the qualities of restraint that lend emphasis to his big scene. He is excellent.

New Poignance

But the surprise of the evening is Lois Smith, who had only a meagre chance in "The Young and the Beautiful" last season. She would seem to be a most unlikely bit of casting, but she justifies the producer's judgment; tall, and with a fragile beauty of her own, she brings a new poignance to the part of the daughter. Her plight becomes correspondingly important.

Everything else is just fine, too. The direction by Alan Schneider seems always sure, never intrusive, and the Peggy Clark sets and drops are workable and authentic.

There isn't the slightest reason, including the price, why you should not go immediately to see this fine production.

The New York Times

November 22, 1956

Theatre: Early Williams

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER eleven years Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie" has lost none of its wistful beauty. It was put on at the City Center last evening with Helen Hayes at the head of a sensitive performance.

In 1945 "The Glass Menagerie" established Mr. Williams as a practical dramatist. To see it again is to realize how much he has changed. There is a streak of savagery in his work now. The humor is bitter. The ugliness is shocking. He has come a long way since 1945—growing in mastery of the theatre, developing power, widening in scope. He has also renounced the tenderness that makes "The Glass Menagerie" such a delicate and moving play.

•

Probably he was closer to the characters of "The Glass Menagerie" than he has been to those of his later plays. For this is an idyl of St. Louis, where once he lived. There must be overtones of his own life in this tale of a dingy alley, shrouded down in poverty and despair. It is a perfect blend of humor and pathos, making a kind of sad poetry that is lovely, touching and a little grotesque. Mr. Williams has never improved on the daintiness and the shy allusiveness of the prose writing in this introductory play.

Everyone remembers with gratitude the acting of Laurette Taylor, Julie Haydon, Eddie Dowling and Anthony Ross in the original performance. Now we can be grateful for another beautiful rendering, under the direction of Alan Schneider. Although Miss Hayes has played the querulous and crochety mother in London, this is her first appearance in the part here. It is one of her finest. For Miss Hayes is the mistress of the little details as well as the broad outlines of a character, and she has brought them all to that enormous City Center stage—the fussiness, the pettiness, the silly coquetry as well as the desperate gallantry and the warmth of a mother trying to save her home.

Lois Smith plays the crippled, withdrawn daughter beautifully and poignantly. As the son James Daly is excellent—irritable and forgiving by turns, and fluent in his transitions from his duties as commentator to those of a pivotal character in the play. In the part of the gentleman caller, Lonny Chapman is admirable. Under the cheapness of this poseur, there is a solid fund of sympathy and understanding.

•

There is no doubt that the vast spaces of the City Center are unkind to the nuances of this requiem to two obscure women. "The Glass Menagerie" is really not quite so comic as it seems to be occasionally. But Miss Hayes and her associates understand it, respect it and weave around it the fabric of somber poetry. Although Mr. Williams has written some overwhelming dramas since 1945, he has not written anything so delicate and perceptive. "The Glass Menagerie" inhabits a half-world between comedy and tragedy where some wounding and amusing things occur.

"The Happiest Millionaire"

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

November 21, 1956

'Happiest Millionaire' Delightful; Pidgeon Heads a Delightful Cast

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Happiest Millionaire," which opened last evening at the Lyceum Theatre, is a most charming comedy with a most charming cast headed by Walter Pidgeon. It is half-true and half-crazy, which is the proper way to organize things in this world, and now it is being delightfully played.

Inevitably, "The Happiest Millionaire" will be called the Philadelphia version of "Life With Father," but this should not be to the detriment of either comedy. Lindsay and Crouse, the authors of "Father," based their play on the personal reminiscences of a New Yorker, and, having been paid off, have taken their rewards with them. Now comes Kyle Crichton with a comedy based on the reminiscences of a Philadelphian, and he, too, should have his rewards.

Plushy Names

For this is a funny and extraordinarily ingratiating play. It has been based by Crichton on the book which he ghosted for Cordelia Drexel Biddle called "My Philadelphia Father." It purports to be no mere piece of fiction, but the real stuff, and the cast of characters resounds with such plushy names as Biddle, Drexel, Duke and Rittenhouse.

Pidgeon returns to the stage after a couple of centuries in Hollywood as Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Cordelia's enthusistic but unpredictable father. He has a fine house at 2104 Walnut St., Philadelphia, a fortune of one million dollars — not hay in 1917 because Woodrow Wilson had barely got into power — and a great enthusiasm for lunacy. He collects alligators and prize fighters and rules his family by bluster. Whenever the butler comes in, the butler inquires deferentially, "You yelled, sir?"

Among those Pidgeon rules is this daughter, Cordelia, who falls in love with a southern boy, Angier Duke. Pidgeon tries to take over and run this romance, and for the first time in his noisy career he meets defeat. He has an awful time being defeated, too, for Angier has a mind of his own and his family also has ninety million dollars.

One of the funniest scenes in a really sunny and delightful play is where Pa Biddle offers this pipsqueak Angier, his daughter's suitor, a cigar, and the boy says, timidly, "We're in cigarettes."

The cast of "The Happiest Millionaire" is a most attractive one, with Ruth Matteson as Pidgeon's long-suffering but understanding wife, Diana van der Vlis as their slender, quixotic daughter, and George Grizzard as Angier Duke. Grizzard must be the outstanding young comedian of this season as he portrays a small and modest millionaire who has mastered the art of ju-jitsu and can throw even his prospective father-in-law around.

There are many other salty and funny performances in this play, including a particularly salty and funny one by Ruth White as a very snooty Mrs. Benjamin Duke, and a couple of wicked little bits by Gaye Jordan as Cousin Lucy Rittenhouse. In the comedy Mrs. Duke, up from the North Carolina tobacco country, makes the acid observation, "All my life I've heard about Philadelphia. Now I find it's true."

Well, whether you find it's true or not is no matter; "The Happiest Millionaire" is fun. And there is a grand Walnut St. setting by George Jenkins.

"THE HAPPIEST MILLIONAIRE"

Comedy by Kyle Crichton, suggested by "My Philadelphia Father" by Cordelia Drexel Biddle and Mr. Crichton; staged by Howard Erskine and Joseph Hayes; setting and lighting by George Jenkins; costumes by Audre; presented by Messrs. Erskine and Hayes at the Lyceum Theatre, November 20, 1956. The cast:

Emma.....Kate Harrington
John Lawless.....Martin Ashe
Livingston Biddle...Don Britton
Joe Mancuso.....Rocco Bufano
Tony Biddle.....Dana White
Cordelia Biddle.....
Diana Van Der Vlis
Charlie Taylor.....Joe Bishop
Anthony J. Drexel Biddle.....
Walter Pidgeon
Mrs. Anthony J. Drexel Biddle..
Ruth Matteson
Aunt Mary Drexel..Katharine Raht
Cousin Lucy Rittenhouse.....
Gaye Jordan
Angier Duke...George Grizzard
O'Malley.....Lou Nova
Mrs. Benjamin Duke..Ruth White
Footman.....Mark Allen

New York Post

November 21, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Tale of a Strenuous Aristocrat

Knowing little more about the Biddles than that there were a lot of them, they lived in Philadelphia and were colorful characters, I'm unable to judge the biographical content of "The Happiest Millionaire," which opened last night at the Lyceum Theater. But it seemed to me that Kyle Crichton's comedy based on the book that he and Cordelia Drexel Biddle wrote about her hearty and athletic father was a pleasant exercise in period Americana (1916-'17) which somehow just missed the theatrical expertness required to bring it to satisfying life on the stage.

Mr. Crichton's play is at its best when it eschews its wispy plot and goes in for the humorous and affectionate glimpses at the arduous home life of its central figure. Anthony J. Drexel Biddle was a strenuous American with an especial fondness for boxers, alligators and the Marine Corps. He seems to have been a rather domineering eccentric with the mind of a healthy child, but he also possessed a genuine warmth and geniality, and his liking for people appears to have been real. He was an uninhibited gentleman who was both trying and likable, and his gusto was undeniable.

For stage purposes, though, he has to be provided with a plot, and, since his daughter was co-author of the biography upon which the play is based, it is natural that the comedy takes for what narrative it possesses her wedding to the young and callow Angier Duke, of the tobacco millions. This would seem a satisfactory enough framework for the narrative, but there also has to be a touch of suspense, and it is here that some difficulties arise. For when Cordelia temporarily jilts her fiance, it seems merely in order that the play can go on for another scene or so.

It is no doubt unfair that "The Happiest Millionaire" should be compared to both "Life With Father" and "Auntie Mame," but I'm afraid it is impossible to avoid it. And the comparisons are not favorable to the new play. It has neither the richness of detail and the vigorous core of the former, nor the steady comic frenzy of the latter. Although its people are likable and some of it is funny, it has a way of appearing to move by fits and starts, and it never quite manages to capture the humorous momentum that might have carried it through its doldrums.

To a large extent, the play must stand or fall through the characterization of its title figure, and I must confess to mixed emotions about Walter Pidgeon's portrayal of the tumultuous older Biddle. Mr. Pidgeon's performance is thoroughly engaging, and you can believe in the warmth and the eccentricity of the violent though friendly gentleman. But I'm not sure that the playing of the role has the necessary vital and dynamic quality which might have added the dominating stature required to give Mr. Crichton's comedy the final authority that it demands.

"The Happiest Millionaire" is fortunate in its juveniles. A charming young actress named Diana van der Vlis plays Cordelia with grace, humor and winning simplicity, and George Grizzard is excellent as young Angier Duke. There is a wonderfully incisive performance by Ruth White as his sharp-tongued mother, and Ruth Matteson is graciously attractive as the understanding Mrs. Biddle. George Jenkins' setting of the family home is of great help to the proceedings. There is much that is engaging in the play, but it does lack the final touch of excellence.

Journal American

November 21, 1956

Pidgeon Fine But the Play Lacks Reality

By JOHN McCLAIN

SAD TO SAY, the case for the rich took a trouncing at the Lyceum last night where "The Happiest Millionaire" was unveiled. I have been waging a squalid little battle in defense of the fact that people don't have to be destitute to be subjects for drama, and I felt I was making some progress with "Sabrina Fair," a couple of seasons ago, but then along comes this one and my whole theory is back on the one-yard line, fourth down and forty-eight yards to go.

For it seemed that Kyle Crichton, who adapted the play from a biography by Cordelia Drexel Biddle, failed to bring more than a sense of the monstrous triviality of these people to the footlights. This is not to suggest that their lives were equally vapid, or that such a suggestion was made in the book, but as the charade emerges one cannot help but wonder why he would spend so much time with such silly people.

Writing Weak

Silly is the word that cloys, and for this the writing is to blame. The millionaire is introduced in red boxing tights and bathrobe, his approach to life and his family is diluted by a preoccupation with live alligators, punchdrunk pugilists and his own enlarged ego. As a simple farce, on the lines of "You Can't Take It With You," it might have had a chance; but when an effort was made to inject "heart" into the proceedings it came too late and the inoculation was inadequate.

The corollary characters are equally unreal. It is perfectly possible for people with over $8.00 in the bank to have quite human emotions, but we are never made aware of the fact. The mother is wooden, the aunt is utterly ridiculous. Only the mother of the groom, an unremitting Southerner who is not only richer but tougher than the Biddles, makes any lifelike sense—and she nearly runs away with the show.

All this is deplorable because Walter Pidgeon, making his belated escape from a hitch in Hollywood, gives a highly competent and endearing performance in the title role. They try, the producers do, to plunge him into our hearts through a series of small devices, and the actor himself risks life and limb, but the stuff isn't there. He remains an engaging cardboard character.

The same is true of the supporting cast. Diana Van der Vlis, making her Broadway debut, is talented and certainly decorative, filled with the irrepressible zest for life required for her part; George Grizzard is an amiable young man, capable of occasional flashes of fire, and except for Ruth White, who plays Mrs. Duke, the inflammable mother-in-law, everybody is competent. Miss White is great.

It seemed to me that George Jenkins ran up a quite acceptable but not overpowering likeness of a Philadelphia town house for the 1916-17 era, and I have no quarrel with the direction of Howard Erskine and Joseph Hayes. Mention must certainly be made of the Alfred Jonniaux portrait over the fireplace.

But I have serious reservations about the more important portrait of the central character which was being painted on the stage. It was neither as attractive nor as honest.

The New York Times

November 21, 1956

Theatre: Happy Evening

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVEN people who are not quite solvent are likely to feel happy about "The Happiest Millionaire," which opened at the Lyceum last evening.

For this popular comedy about the fabulous personality of Anthony J. Drexel Biddle is at once decent and amusing, which is an infrequent combination. And Walter Pidgeon gives a wonderful performance in the leading part. He makes something humorous and disarming out of a character that could be a bore if the acting did not have style.

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This is the comedy that Kyle Crichton has made out of the book he and Cordelia Drexel Biddle wrote about her father. "My Philadelphia Father" was the title the book had before the theatre laid hands on it. Since Cordelia is one of the original authors and is now an important character in the play, one assumes that there must be some resemblance to truth in some parts of the play.

At least, one hopes so. As a member of society Mr. Biddle may not be altogether acceptable. But as a father and a human being he ranks at the top. If he is full of prejudices, they are likable. If he is overbearing, he has a heart of gold. Although his hobbies are strenuous, they keep people on their toes.

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Some children with fathers as aggressive as Mr. Biddle go through the rest of their lives complaining that they were permanently scarred, and write books that portray the old man as a psychopathic monster. Not the least attractive aspect of "The Happiest Millionaire" is its affection and humorous admiration for an uninhibited master of everybody's ceremonies. Everybody in this comedy is a friend, sooner or later.

Since "The Happiest Millionaire" is a popular comedy, it does not pretend to probe inside the minds of the characters. It merely contrives a thread of story on which humor can be hung. Although Cordelia as an adolescent girl enjoys boxing with her father and her brothers, she notices that suitors avoid her like a plague. "The Happiest Millionaire" sets itself the problem of salvaging a normal courtship and marriage for her out of the bedlam of the Biddle family. Mr. Crichton, the playwright, has solved the problem with exuberant good humor.

Everyone concerned with the production has helped him generously. To give the play its proper environment, George Jenkins has designed a drawing-room that is both seedy and opulent and worn from the strenuous life that flows through it.

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Howard Erskine and Joseph Hayes have directed a whirlwind performance that is not above taking sentimentality seriously. As father Biddle, Mr. Pidgeon is just about ideal. Although he is headstrong, noisy and boastful, he is also a gentleman, and fleetingly humble when something penetrates that athletic exterior of his.

Cordelia is played by an uncommonly talented young lady who is making her Broadway debut in the part. Diana van der Vlis is a blonde who has spirit as well as beauty. She plunges into the temperamental whirlpool of Cordelia's adolescent emotions and makes a stunning performance out of them. As her diffident suitor, terrified by such a boisterous family, George Grizzard gives a hilarious performance that freshens the whole rumpus.

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Ruth White is also funny as a dead-pan snob with a malicious tongue. Lou Nova fights his way through one scene as a visiting pug. There are enjoyable performances by Ruth Mattesen, Katharine Raht, Don Britton, Dana White, Rocco Bufano and several others.

Altogether, a delightful evening. "The Happiest Millionaire" gives his guests a very good time.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 21, 1956

THEATER

'The Happiest Millionaire

By WALTER KERR

IN "The Happiest Millionaire," Walter Pidgeon has a mysterious friend named Diefenderfer who is a trouble-shooter and who can do absolutely anything he is asked to do. Where was Defienderfer during the rewrites?

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Dramatist Kyle Crichton has likely enough material for a fast domestic comedy in the colorful foibles of Philadelphia's Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, and the production has been wandering the road long enough for its live baby alligator to have reached voting age.

Yet here the show is at the Lyceum huffing and puffing like the little engine that couldn't—in a desperate effort to prove that its principal character is an absolute card. Mr. Chichton and his directors, Howard Erskine and Joseph Hayes, are terribly afraid we'll miss the point.

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The curtain isn't up before a mauled young fellow with a black eye staggers in from the garden: it seems that daily boxing is de rigeur around this house. A huge crate is hauled on and flips over on its side, without human aid: yes, it houses an alligator. Daughter darts in, in leotard and sporty blue sweater, to dodge athletically around the 1916 antimacassars. Father bolts in to seize mama and whirl her wildly about the floor while a Victrola spouts jazz. Various younger brothers hurtle through doorways, clatter up stairs, and pitch right down them again in ever-changing military uniforms.

"Did you yell, sir?" asks the butler, as he comes in—with a black eye of his own—from the garden. When the boxing gloves have given their all beneath the glittering crystal chandeliers, jiu jitsu is tried. (The evening does become funny along about here, what with Lou Nova trading punches with a winded Walter Pidgeon, and young George Grizzard going green at the gills as his wrestling lessons prove altogether too successful.)

In short, these are busy bees at the Lyceum. If only they'd paused for breath, sat down for a moment early in the game, and bothered to establish these whirlwinds as possible and likable people, the story might have been a good bit different. As it is, by the time they do reach for a little family sentiment and homespun philosophy (it's pretty homespun, along the lines of "Old men always know what they want to do when it's too late to do it"), we've caught on to methods of labor and can no longer see the mood for the mechanics.

Mr. Pidgeon hasn't really the temperament for this sort of frantic toe-dancing, but he goes at it with a will-skipping about in dressing-gown and sneakers, sounding an alligator mating-call, flopping flabbergasted into a chair when some one talks back to him—and he winds up an ingratiating, if miscast, performer.

George Grizzard is luckier. He has an amiable squeak and a terrifying rigidity to bring to the stylized business of fighting his romantic way through a household of whirling dervishes, and the evening's best laughs are his. Diana Van Der Vlis twists her pretty face into an enormous number of frowns, pouts, and gapes as a marriageable daughter. Ruth Matteson is sweet and tolerant as an understanding mother, and Ruth White makes a nice little killing for herself as a New York dragon who finds that Philadelphia fruit punch flows like water.

What "The Happiest Millionaire" needs, I think, is a bit more Philadelphia and a little less Luna Park.

Daily Mirror

November 21, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Happiest Millionaire' A Zany Laugh-fest

• There's a hit at the Lyceum Theatre which is a joyful and gay thing.

"The Happiest Millionaire" is a happy play about a happy family. And it's about time we got some joy out of playgoing. It has to do with the Anthony J. Drexel Biddles of Philadelphia. Of 2104 Walnut Street, to be exact. Papa Biddle has a million bucks in the bank, but doesn't let that bother him.

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THOUGH A STAUNCH Republican, he is as democratic as they come. When a promising kid can't pay his final year's tuition at the University of Pa., he orders: Have 'em send me the bill, and make yourself at home here.

Boxing champs, evangelists and socialites rub elbows at his parties.

He loves life and lives it to the full. He argues that you can't take it with you or put it in a vault. And the more you spend of it, the more there seems to be. Unlike money. He drills thousands of troops against the day we go to war in 1917. He keeps alligators in his conservatory because he likes them. It's known as the alligatorium.

When his tomboy daughter, Cordelia, falls in love with Angier Duke, he doesn't want to lose her. And he doesn't think much of Angie—until the lad ups and paralyzes him with a couple of jiu-jitsu holds. As for The Mrs. Benjamin Duke, who controls 90 million dollars and practically built a university with her own two hands—well!

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BUT EVENTUALLY the Dukes and Bidlles resolve their differences for the sake of their progeny. The Republican Biddles shake hands with the Democrat Dukes, and the eccentric Philadelphia social leaders tacitly decide never again to mention that an ancestor had once entertained Ulysses S. Grant.

"The Happiest Millionaire" was fashioned by Kyle Crichton from the best-seller—"My Philadelphia Father"—which he wrote with Cordelia Drexel Biddle. It's a mad comedy about wacky, wonderful people.

Walter Pidgeon etches a wonderfully warm, hilarious portrait of the lusty, opinionated, friendly and free-wheeling Main Line coupon-clipper. Ruth Matteson is charming as his long-suffering but ever-loving spouse. Diana Van Der Vlis, making her Broadway bow, is delightful as the hoydenish Cordelia. Don Britton and Dana White are good as her athletic brothers.

GEORGE GRIZZARD, who played a baby-faced killer in "The Desperate Hours," contributes an enormously droll and winning characterization of the Angier Duke who looks like a sissy, but can turn into a tiger when pressed too far.

Howard Erskine and Joseph Hayes have not only brought a new hit to the Lyceum Theatre, but also directed it with the insight of a psychologist and the speed of an Olympics sprinter.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 21, 1956

A Little Biddle Goes a Long Way

By TOM DONNELLY.

To the extent that it's about anything, Kyle Crichton's "The Happiest Millionaire" (at the Lyceum) is about the Biddles and Drexels of old Philadelphia, and the Dukes of North Carolina and New York. I favor the Dukes, on the whole, and presently I'll tell you why.

The curtain hasn't been up five minutes when I found myself taking a dim view of Col. Anthony J. Drexel Biddle. Mrs. Drexel Biddle is delayed downtown on a shopping expedition, and Col. Biddle calls out the Pinkerton men to go look for her.

I assume this hysterical gesture is intended to demonstrate the Colonel's deep love for his wife, and be cute and funny besides, but it just made me think that the Colonel had a lot of scrapple in the upper story.

Dry But Not High.

Shortly thereafter a delivery boy, upon seeing the Colonel sipping wine, expresses the opinion that the Colonel, as founder of the Drexel Biddle Bible classes, ought to set the community a good example. "You're right!" cries the Colonel, and orders his entire wine cellar destroyed on the spot.

As the sound of bottles being shattered drifted in from the wings, a mantle of depression drifted down upon my shoulders.

Then there is a big family hassle over the education of young Cordelia. Should she stay at home and take boxing lessons from Papa, or be packed off to a finishing school to acquire a thin civilized veneer?

Then the Colonel's collection of pet alligators, one of them real and two of them looking remarkably like papier mache, get loose and scare the wits out of Cousin Lucy Rittenhouse, a feat comparable to the moving of a molehill.

Enter the Dukes.

Along about here, Cordelia gets herself engaged to Angier Duke, and things pick up gratifyingly.

Young Mr. Duke amused me considerably with his soft moans about the ghastly prospect of having to take over a vast tobacco business, and with his timid response to the Colonel's suggestion that he should have bravely gone right on skiing with a broken ankle. "The bone was kind of sticking out," Angier offers in plaintive defense of his cowardly inertia.

It remained, however, for Angier's mother, Mrs. Benjamin Duke, to warm the heart. Sweeping into that 1917 Philadelphia parlor with the monumental disdain of a woman who has known a far, far better life, Mrs. Duke peers into the alligator pit and mutters, "Just when you think you've hit bottom around here...."

Informed that Cordelia is tired as a result of the endless festivities attendant upon her approaching wedding to Angier, Mrs. Duke snorts, "Tired? I built Duke University with my own two hands and I'm not tired."

True, to joke about the dullness of Philadelphia is to beat a dead horse, but even so Mrs. Duke gets my vote and my deep admiration.

Dull Routine.

To sum up, "The Happiest Millionaire" has a number of amusingly acrid incidental passages, but the bulk of it is routine, in the manner of a dozen other family comedies, and most of the characters do not suggest real people from yesterday's Philadelphia, but caricatures from Greasepaint Alley.

Walter Pidgeon looks a fine militant figure of a man as the Colonel, and he is amiable in a low-voltage way.

If Mr. Pidgeon never really takes command of the stage, it may be because playwright Crichton has given him a dull eccentric to interpret and, at that, an eccentric who is compelled to more or less stand around on the sidelines, while the burden of the play is carried by others.

Diana van der Vlis is charming as Cordelia (the real center of events), George Grizzard plays Angier with a light, expert touch, and Ruth White squeezes the last drop of juice out of the plum role of Mrs. Duke.

"Girls of Summer"

The New York Times

November 20, 1956

Theatre: Drama by Nash

Shelley Winters Stars in 'Girls of Summer'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN the case of "Girls of Summer," which opened at the Longacre last evening, every thing seems to be on the verge of a completed job.

N. Richard Nash, the author, has psychoanalyzed his characters up and down and ought now to be ready to write a drama about them. Jack Garfein, the director, has also psychoanalyzed the characters and the play. He and his actors have accounted intellectually for all the neuroses, psychoses, inhibitions and frustrations that clutter up the setting. In another week everybody should be ready to make a drama out of the materials Mr. Nash has provided.

Mr. Nash is author of "The Rainmaker" of two seasons ago—a Western with a theme. In "Girls of Summer" he is writing about some highly complicated young people who live in a remodeled brownstone house in New York. It is summer, when everyone is particularly at loose ends.

The New Yorkers are cultivated students of the arts who are conspicuously unsuccessful at living. A loud-mouthed, overbearing young construction foreman from New Jersey barges in, turns everything upside down and gives an impression of knowing what life is all about. Everyone seems to be waiting for a real man to come in and take over. In the last act, however, it appears that the foreman also has problems. The extrovert is an introvert, too.

All this makes for an intense drama that always seems to be on the point of arriving at a decision. Every scene seems to be part of the preparation for something that in a moment or two will clarify Mr. Nash's theme. The moment never arrives. Since the characters are exclusively concerned with their psychic problems, they are not of much personal interest to the audience, and the drama never gets beyond the blueprint stage.

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In his direction, Mr. Garfein has taken Mr. Nash at face value. He has analyzed Mr. Nash's analyses, and ably, no doubt. The cast includes some interesting actors — Shelley Winters, an attractive, vigorous young lady with a highly-compressed acting style; Pat Hingle, a blunt, forceful, exhilarating actor; Lenka Peterson, a slender, diminutive actress with nervous drive; Arthur Storch, an alert actor with an amusing knack for playing blundering youths; George Peppard, who expertly plays a sly, malicious dance teacher.

But, in general, the performance is mannered, over-trained, self-conscious; it never starts flowing. It seems like a rehearsal just before the company is ready to settle down and act the play. Boris Aronson has provided a remarkably interesting set of an impromptu interior with glimpses of a city courtyard that pretends to be a bit of the country. Since the inhabitants of the apartment are patrons of the arts, Mr. Aronson has also had an opportunity to contribute a still-life on his own time.

But Mr. Nash seems to be less interested in reaching a conclusion than in the process of drama. Although Mr. Nash and the actors have set the table, they never serve the finished meal.

"GIRLS OF SUMMER"

Play by N. Richard Nash; staged by Jack Garfein; settings by Boris Aronson; costumes by Kenn Barr; lighting by Lee Watson; presented by Cheryl Crawford at the Longacre Theatre, November 21, 1956. The cast:

Gene Mitchell.....Arthur Storch
Mickey Argent..George Peppard
Hilda Brookman..Shelley Winters
Binnie Brookman..Lenka Peterson
Jules Taggart.....Pat Hingle
Tommy Brookman..John Harkins
Phyllis Brookman..Sandra Stevens
Mrs. Mitchell.....Nellie Burt

Journal American

November 20, 1956

Pat Hingle And Shelley In Triumph

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE RETURNS from this precinct on "Girls of Summer," which opened at the Longacre last night, show a pleasant plurality in favor of this new play by N. Richard Nash. It is a vital and often amusing evening; it has a performance by Pat Hingle that will stand for some time as a monument to sheer drive and combustion; it has an equally incisive if less strenuous contribution by Shelley Winters. It sometimes wanders, and the second act falters and fidgets, but I mark it a night well spent.

The author is certainly one of our good men with modern idiom. His people resort to little symbolism or esoteric nonsense; if his story is somewhat meagre, if the horizon is never farther away than the next apartment building, he fills in the space intervening with resounding dialogue. His people are easily audible, and what they say is usually worth hearing.

Fine Introductory Scene

As in his earlier effort "The Rainmaker," Mr. Nash deposits a mysterious and dominant stranger into an apparently pedestrian household and lets things build from there. In this instance it is Mr. Hingle, a sort of Great Gatsby with a cream-colored Jaguar, and he has set his sights on the young sister who is being reared by Old Maid Shelley Winters. The minute he walks onstage we know he will wind up with Miss Winters, but the means to the end are stormy and often ingenious.

There is as good an introductory scene as you'll encounter in many a matinee when Hingle enters and makes himself known. Miss Winters has her own big moment at the finish of the second act and the beginning of the third, and Mr. Hingle comes back at her with a brilliant and compelling finale a scene later.

Along the way are excellent efforts by Arthur Storch, who carries on his own little subplot—a losing battle with homosexuality; by George Peppard, groping his way through adolescence; and by Lenka Peterson, the readily-awakened young sister.

Direction Excels

But it is Miss Winters' and Mr. Hingle's evening, and with the explicit help of Jack Garfein, who directed, they keep us emotionally aroused for a reasonable hunk of the time.

Boris Aronson has devised a quite complicated single set, a New York apartment and terrace, which offers the actors a tasteful field of play.

"Girls of Summer" will not create a new chapter in theatrical history. The awakening of a drudge is certainly a familiar idea, but here it is told with exceptional vitality and performed with an overwhelming freedom from inhibition. It is well worth a visit.

New York Post

November 20, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Some People With Problems of Sex

In "Girls of Summer," N. Richard Nash, who shifted to the field of romantic comedy in "The Rainmaker," returns rather lugubriously to the slice-of-life drama. Mr. Nash's new play, which opened last night at the Longacre Theater, indicates that he is a versatile author and has scenes containing good realistic observation, but I thought the results were otherwise indifferent. Despite an excellent performance by Pat Hingle in the evening's most interesting role, the work struck me as a flat and unexhilarating investigation into the bypaths of sex and frustration.

The playwright is bent on examining the private life of a young woman who has devoted herself to being a mother to her ingenue sister and to an effort to protect the girl from any man who might come prowling about her with dishonorable intentions. In the process, the older sister has found herself threatened with spinsterhood, and she can no longer sleep well at night. She is even mildly tempted by a ballet director who has some doubts about his own sexual inclinations. And, when a flashy and self-confident young stranger arrives with designs on the sister, she is really upset.

The Interloper

It is this stranger who is the one really striking figure in the play. He is a brash and seemingly assured fellow, who sports a Jaguar, a diamond ring and silk shirts and isn't averse to suggesting that he is quite a success with women. But the older sister, while she doesn't know much about herself, understands him and she realizes that he, too, is at bottom a mass of doubts and uncertainties, and is quite decent at heart. In outline, he is a familiar enough figure in the drama, but Mr. Nash has observed him freshly and sympathetically, and he is played by Pat Hingle.

You may recall Mr. Hingle as the disagreeable and conniving brother in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," and, if you do, you will remember that he gave what was very close to a perfect performance. It is clear that his excellence in Tennessee Williams' play was no accident. In "Girls of Summer," he acts with a fine and incisive sense of character, and he gives every scene in which he appears a dramatic lift and understanding that bring it to immediate life. It might have been a better drama if he had been the central figure.

Family Party

The main character, though, is the older sister, and, while Mr. Nash has studied her with sympathy, she is not nearly so interesting a personage. Furthermore, while the playwright can provide effective details of character and set down such an episode as a family party that goes disastrously wrong with notable accuracy, his dramatic narrative has an unfortunate way of faltering and getting itself involved in dullness. He doesn't make his points with much vigor or emotional power, and I think "Girls of Summer" is too rarely either moving or striking.

Shelley Winters has the role of the older sister, and she plays with sincerity and directness, although she isn't nearly as effective as she was last season in "A Hatful of Rain." Lenka Peterson is believable as the younger sister, while Arthur Storch as the mixed-up dance director and George Peppard as a young man with his own doubts are also entirely credible. And there is an offstage trumpet that wails hauntingly if a bit intrusively. Boris Aronson's setting is characteristically atmospheric. But Mr. Hingle gives the new play what dramatic life it has.

New York Herald Tribune

November 20, 1956

THEATER

'Girls of Summer'

By WALTER KERR

N. RICHARD NASH'S "Girls of Summer" would seem to be a reasonably perceptive, not ill-written, slightly jaundiced play about the midsummer passions that ultimately overtake sturdy spinsters, and the problems we all face in finding out just who we are. As a fuming and frustrated fellow remarks at the halfway mark, "It's like everybody's in a phone booth with a bad connection."

As a matter of fact, there's more to this observation than meets the eye. It's not only the characters who feverishly roam the Longacre stage in search of emotional identity. Most of the actors are pretty badly tangled up, too.

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Shelley Winters, for instance, is the same Shelley Winters who gave us such an extraordinarily touching performance in last season's "Hatful of Rain." Yet here she is again, with the half-opened mouth, the eyes never quite dry from tears, the hands stabbing forward in odd little unfinished gestures—to almost no effect at all.

Here, too, is Lenka Peterson, a shrewd and personable youngster bent on giving absolute outline to the rather embarrassing ardors of the immature. Miss Peterson knows that over-eager adolescents do sometimes look like tragic masks wearing pony-tails, and she has a sharp ear for grindingly giddy inflections. Yet the inflections do grind; the callow posturings are so literal that they hurt more than they illuminate.

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What's wrong? Basically, I think, director Jack Garfein has misjudged his play. Working with a company of obviously able people — many of them products of the Actors' Studio — he has gone looking for Freudian depths, jungle drums, and wheels within wheels in a piece of work that is part sentiment, part romance, part comedy, and only part bitter tea. The assorted hipsters, ballet-masters, and straightforward working folk who inhabit spinster Hilda Brookman's brownstone apartment may only be digging into a Sunday breakfast or having a fling at a game of postoffice.

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But the implications that may be read into their casual doings are early filled with such breathlessness, broken sentences, flailing pauses, all the fumbles and stumbles of the close-to-crackup crowd that whatever passing charms the script may possess are never allowed to grow on you. It's nothing at all for a character to stride across the stage, stand for three beats in acute exasperation, slap his hands together violently to release his throttled emotion, and then give vent to an explosion in excess of the rather simple circumstances—and all this long before anything genuinely distressing has happened to the spinster, her wayward younger sister, or her friends.

Thus, by the time Miss Winters is hurled to the floor, her tousled head bent double over a symbolic toy clown, to sob out a miserable "Don't leave me now!," we have charged so far past the actual temperature of Mr. Nash's lines that it seems — for a moment — as though Tennessee Williams had rewritten "The Voice of the Turtle."

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It must be said that Pat Hingle, as a bullheaded contracting foreman who wears silk shirts and trusts nobody, comes within a hair's breadth of making the oddly disproportionate method work. Mr. Hingle's furies seem to have a blaze behind them, and the evening snaps up taut when he is talking about the boredom of building prefabricated houses or making the reluctant miss Winters speak to him most politely.

The play is tantalizing in its occasional insights. But the production may have tried to see more than is really there—and worn itself thin in the process.

Daily Mirror

November 20, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Girls of Summer' Just An Also-Ran

• Longacre's new play about the bitter and frustrated fails to score.

We thought that N. Richard Nash had arrived with "The Rainmaker." We were captivated by its insight, imagination, humor and poetic quality. But the young playwright has lost a bit of the prestige he gained with that one, via "Girls of Summer," the Longacre Theatre's new tenant.

This has been quite a semester for plays about the bitter and frustrated. And, frankly, we're getting fed up with them. These "slices of life" featuring baffled and bewildered little people are beginning to wear us down. You can get the same thing, for free, if you leave your bedroom window up in the right location.

NASH IS CONCERNED with a construction superintendent, living it up on a two-weeks holiday. He pitches rapid woo at a susceptible baby ballerina. But her big sister, who also serves as a mother to the kid, attempts to break up the whirlwind affair. She tries to offer herself to him instead, but is afraid to go through with it.

There's a ballet maestro in her boarding house who yearns for the company at a bar limited to the boys, yet sickens when he's approached. There's another boarder, a teen-ager who wants to be a Casanova, and can't even master a motorcycle. As for the muscle man with the expensive suits and rented yellow Jaguar, he hasn't the courage to accept a partnership in a building firm.

Only one guy out of the bunch gets what he wants: a hot trumpet player next door, who lassoes a different dame every night, and dresses them all in the same luminescent blue robe. But he has to go to the needle to enjoy these nocturnal adventures. What a bunch of potential patients for the psychoanalists' couches.

Pat Hingle, who's been running up a record as a scene stealer, is up to his tricks again as the brash boss builder hiding insecurity behind a facade of bluster. What vitality and entertainment value the new arrival has is due to his personality. But even Pat can't put enough get-up-and-go into "Girls of Summer" to make it better than an also-ran.

• • •

SHELLEY WINTERS, of the films, has yet to master the art of concealing art. Her repressed elder sister has its moments, but some of them are marred by too many Actors' Studio armwavings. Lenka Peterson, Arthur Storch, George Peppard, John Harkins, Sandra Stevens and Nellie Burt get all from their roles that director Jack Garfein has apparently demanded of them.

Producer Cheryl Crawford's judgment of a play or a musical is usually sound, but in this instance it's been switched onto a sidetrack that leads nowhere. Girls of Summer, incidentally, are young femmes who sizzle, but sweat it out. They're not a very attractive lot.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 20, 1956

An Omelet Made Of Broken Shells

By TOM DONNELLY.

N. Richard Nash's "Girls of Summer" (at the Longacre) has got everything, absolutely everything. I mean it's got everything we've been seeing in plays for the past decade or more.

There are these two sisters, see, named Hilda and Binnie. Binnie is the cute, young romantic, dependent one, and Hilda is the strong, resolute, older one, with both feet planted squarely on the ground.

Well, actually they're planted in a quagmire of neuroses. Hilda may think that all these years she's been bringing up Binnie, and running a Manhattan boarding house, and generally sacrificing herself to the remnants of the family, as her late parents would have wanted her to do, but actually Hilda has been hiding from herself.

Immediately Fascinated.

It is Jules Taggert, a mysterious stranger from New Jersey, who reveals the real Hilda. In the beginning, Jules is interested in Binnie, who is, after all, a sweet kid. But, when Jules gets a look at Hilda, he is immediately fascinated. He discovers that she bites her fingernails down to the cuticle, that she can't sleep at night if Binnie is out enjoying herself, and that she can't sleep at all without a nightcap of warm milk.

Also, Hilda is involved in a tentative romance with a ballet instructor from upstairs. It is tentative for lots of reasons. For one thing, Hilda doesn't want to get deeply involved with another human being, she just wants to lurk inside her shell, which has a lot in common with the casting on a refrigerator. For another thing, the ballet instructor has a shell of his own, and it is symptomatic of Hilda's inner disturbance that she shouldn't have noticed that he does not like girls to touch him as if they had something serious in mind.

Upside Down.

Well, sir, Jules Taggert turns that boarding house upside down. He roars about in his gaudy silk shirts and his flashy jewelry, and he goes up like a sky rocket if anybody looks at him sideways.

"How'd you like the ballet last night?" somebody asks, and Jules is immediately off in a cloud of rage. He accuses the questioner of trying to make Jules look silly, by forcing him to reveal himself as a non-aesthete. Has Jules pretended to be an aesthete? No. Then, what's the idea of that mean, low, prying, sneaky question?

Pretty soon, Hilda begins to think that maybe Jules is hiding inside a shell himself. She launches an attack on him, he counter-attacks, and the two go reeling and ricocheting around the parlor, with screams of: "Nobody knows anybody!" and: "We have to come out and look at each other!"

No Rich Playboy.

Jules has a secret, all right. He's not a rich playboy. He's just a foreman for a construction company, and he feels he isn't good enough to go into partnership with his boss, who is a real conservative gentleman and never talks out of the side of his mouth, the way Jules does.

Binnie is terribly upset when she discovers that Hilda and Jules have blasted themselves down to their respective foundations. Hilda understands what Binnie is going through: "She's in pain. She hurts."

The upshot of it all is that, from now on, Hilda probably won't be biting her fingernails.

"Girls of Summer" has at least one special distinction. I have never seen a work so rich in violent reactions to feeble provocations.

Amnesia, Too?

Shelley Winters plays Hilda as if the girl were afflicted not only with all the fashionable Freudian ailments, but also with amnesia. Last night, Miss Winters seemed to have the shakiest grasp of her lines, and her nervous instability was so extreme that it is the better part of charity not to discuss her performance in detail.

Pat Hingle, struggles vehemently with the unappetizing role of Jules Taggert, and who can blame him if he gets nowhere in particular? Arthur Storch, as the ballet instructor, achieves the only relative success of the evening.